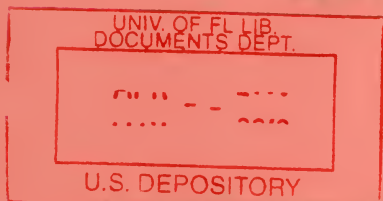




Meeting the Needs of OLDER PEOPLE at the Community Level



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF
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Welfare Administration
Office of Aging

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THE TOPIC you have suggested seems very appropriate. For to me the most significant fact is that we *are* meeting the needs of older people at the community level. And I am going to approach the topic from the viewpoint of what the community is, what the needs are, and how we can go about meeting them.

At the outset I should point out that there appears to be agreement that the community is basic. We have come to recognize that our programs, if they are to be successful, must be community-based. It is here that the individual grows up, lives, and works; and it is with his friends and neighbors that his needs must be met and services must be provided.

I would like to make it clear that, while I am going to be discussing the community, there is no need to put the community in opposition to the individual. We assume that the individual has a basic responsibility; but we also assume that the community can help provide him opportunities to meet his needs.

There is likewise no need to put the community in opposition to the State, nor the State to the Federal Government. We live in a society in which it is not Federal Government vs. State government vs. local government vs. the individual, but one where the individual and his government work together. We live in a society where Federal and State and local governments work together.

There are many needs that must be met, and a variety of ways to describe them. An elderly woman once phrased the matter fairly simply and comprehensively for me. She said "I'll tell you what the needs of older persons are—we need a place to live, something to do, something to do with, someone to do for, and someone to care." This is the kind of description that covers community goals for its older citizens—a place to live, something to do, something to do with, someone to do for, and someone to care.

Basic to meeting these needs is the development of a positive attitude toward older people. I think one of the significant changes that has occurred recently is a new attitude. No longer is it a case of "we" and "they," but a recognition

that we are talking about "us." We should realize that old age is not something removed from us but rather something close to us. We should understand that whatever we do for the aged today we do for ourselves tomorrow, and for our grandchildren the day after.

Community Programs

I HAVE also been impressed with the spirit with which these programs are being developed. It is a spirit which can be summarized by a quotation from a British physician, Dr. Thomas Rudd, in an article describing how programs are developed. He said: "At once sentimentality prompts us to do something for the 'poor old folks.' Clearly, something needs to be done, but if we are to do it well, our thinking and our motives must be right. Old age must be made tolerable, not because we are sorry for the old, but because it is morally right and necessary that people at *all* stages of life have a fair deal." This is the spirit in which, I think, we are beginning to develop programs.

The community involvement in programs is also impressive. We are coming to recognize that this task is far too big for any one group or any one segment of society. We must have public groups and voluntary groups, religious organizations and secular and fraternal organizations. We must have universities, and we must have government at all

levels. Increasingly, this kind of cooperation is manifested.

And, also increasingly, we are coming to recognize that the needs of older people are extremely varied. Older people, as you well know, are no more alike than younger ones. The corollary is that there cannot be just a single program for older people; there must be many programs. We do not have one older person duplicated 18 million times in our society; instead, we have 18 million distinct individuals. As a consequence we must develop a multiplicity of programs.

I am also impressed with the intent of these programs. We are beginning to recognize that a fundamental objective is to maintain independence. Those who have most contact with older people tell us that what older people fear most is not death but loss of independence. All of us recognize that death will come, but what we fear most is the loss of control of our lives. Increasingly, we are designing programs aimed at keeping people independent as long as possible.

I am favorably impressed with the sheer variety of programs that have been developed. I would like to mention some of these that I have seen in order to indicate what communities can do.

In Winnetka, Ill., for example, retired persons aid the schools by working with those students we call "under-achievers." In every school system there

are such students whom we know should be doing much better than they are. The question becomes "How do you stimulate them?" Usually, the answer lies in a person-to-person relationship. So in Winnetka they are using the retired person to work with these underachievers. The initial results of this project are very encouraging. Virtually all of the underachievers have shown marked improvement by having an adult work closely with them. As important as the individual contact is, I suspect that the qualities of age—wisdom, patience, tolerance, and objectivity—help significantly in this progress.

This program with underachievers has been so successful that it has been extended to "gifted" and average students. Here the emphasis is on enrichment—on stimulating and assisting the young people to broaden their horizons by digging deeper into the sciences, humanities, and other fields.

I recall a city where retired people are conducting nature walks. They are giving instruction to children, and adults, too. In another city one may take a guided tour of the museum with a retired art critic.

In New York City older persons are giving still another educational service. They come into the classroom in what is called the "Eye-Witness to History" program. In our older people we have an amazing resource. We have people in

our society who saw the first automobile, who witnessed the first flight of the airplane. They can describe to students what happened the first day an automobile was driven down the street. Or they can describe what happened in World War I.

Recreational Programs

I THINK, too, of the summer camps that have been developed. These have been started in many places. Not long ago I visited one that was run by the Salvation Army. They had built cabins, just as at camps for children. They bring older city people to this summer camp for 2-week vacations. I remember talking with one older woman and asking her, "Why is it that you just sit by this lake when they have all of these activities? Why don't you participate and enjoy yourself?" She replied politely, but answered in effect, "Go away! Let me look at the lake!" She added, though, "Please come and see me when I return home." And I did. She lived in a single room, up two flights of stairs to the third floor. Her room had only one window and this looked out on a blank wall and down on an alley. After seeing her room I could understand why she was content for 2 weeks just to sit and look out on a beautiful lake scene.

I can mention other vacations for older people that are now possible. For

example, one of the newspapers in New York City sponsors a drive each year to collect money for bus trips and a variety of other types of vacations.

I think of the senior citizen library that has been established in Dallas. One of our serious gaps is our lack of information—and there is no single repository of what we do have. In Dallas, the *community* wanted this, and through a gift the Ferguson Memorial Library was established. This library now has one of the largest collections of gerontological materials in the country.

I remember the State Welfare Director who was concerned that so many older clients—people on old-age assistance—lived alone. But she was impressed that many of these older people were quite able to move about at home and in the community. So she put two-and-two together and said, “Why don’t we have those who can get about visit those who are less mobile?” Before long she had more than 2,000 older people making home visits to other older people.

In Boston there is a library that recognized the fact that older people like to read but frequently cannot because of the small type. The librarian decided something should be done about it. So he began encouraging publishers to print books in larger type. Now there are more than 600 different books that are printed in extra large type. Many New England libraries, and those in other parts of the country, have separate sec-

tions—a “corner for tired eyes”—in which these books for older people are kept. A list of these books may be obtained from the American Optometric Association.

A similar problem was handled a little differently in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. There the Lions Club purchased two bedside machines that reflect the material from a book onto the ceiling in big type. The bedridden person just looks at the ceiling and reads. And he merely presses a little gadget to turn the page.

Also important, and different, is the drivers' school in Denver. It becomes almost imperative today for an individual, if he is to be independent, to be able to move about. And yet, along with this need for mobility has come a decline in public transportation. So it becomes necessary for large numbers of older people to drive automobiles. But there is a hazard involved. District Judge Sherman G. Finesilver of Denver has a drivers' school in which he teaches older people how partly to compensate for certain disabilities and also how to improve their driving in other ways.

New Jersey is approaching this matter in a different way—their State Division on Aging, working with the State Highway Department, has a broad highway accident prevention program, aimed particularly at teaching older people to be better drivers and pedestrians. Statistics on pedestrian fatalities are startling. They indicate that in every State, 50 to

60 percent of the pedestrian fatalities are persons over 65. There is a tremendous need for safety programs that focus on older pedestrians.

Housing and Home Care

I THINK of housing as another area in which communities are making progress. In Cleveland a few weeks ago I saw some of their fine new apartment buildings. They have five large projects specifically designed for older people. In one of these, Springbrook Estates overlooking a beautiful park, I was in an apartment having a living room and balcony, bedroom, kitchen, and bathroom. The rent—with all utilities—was \$35 a month.

I think also of Brookline, Needham, Newton, and Wellesley—four small communities in Massachusetts that wanted to establish a homemaker service. A homemaker service, you know, is a program where trained homemakers are available to go into the home of an aged or ill person and assist him. Let me recount an incident I observed that points up the value of homemaker service.

I remember being in an information and referral center—and this is another service that many communities are establishing—when an elderly gentleman came in and said to the counsellor, “I would like to get a job. Can you help me?” The counsellor was a good one, and she said, “Well, Mr. Jones, why do

you want a job? You've been retired many years and you haven't been seeking employment. What has happened that makes you want a job now?" The man said, "I'll tell you. A few weeks ago Mrs. Jones fell and broke her hip. She went to the hospital. She's home now, and is doing nicely but she still has to lie in bed and can't do the housework. I try to do it but us old fellers' eyes don't see very good and I don't notice the dust under the chair and then she gets all excited. So I thought I'd go out and get a job and then I could hire someone to come in and clean." "Well," the counsellor said, "what you need is someone to help you take care of the house." A homemaker was sent in until Mrs. Jones was able to take over again.

In those four communities in Massachusetts, a joint homemaker service has been established, since the small size of the individual communities would be a handicap to underwriting such a program. Incidentally, the homemakers they use are older women. So these communities are not only providing a service but also an opportunity—a way to use older people.

Other Notable Programs

IN RIVERDALE, N.Y., the senior high school class has "adopted" the Hebrew Home for the Aged. Students come there every day to cheer the residents and be helpful in other ways.

In New Haven, Conn., and Dallas, Tex., dental programs for homebound people are operating. Older people need dental care no less than younger ones, but there is a problem. Frequently the older person cannot come to the dentist's office. Through a demonstration grant from the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, special equipment has been developed so that dentists can go into homes for the aged, nursing homes, and even private homes to provide dental care.

In Nassau County, Long Island, N.Y., a county home for the aged is reaching out into the community. It has established a Gerontology Center to coordinate and stimulate information and public education programs for all the elderly people in Nassau.

In Providence, R.I., a public housing project has a professional nurse on duty 24 hours a day. In Ann Arbor, Mich., a nearby hospital does the basic screening of all the project residents, making early diagnosis and providing referral and follow-through service. They are practicing preventive medicine; they are not waiting until people become ill but are trying to keep people in good health.

In St. Louis there is a special section of a park in which shuffleboard courts and tables and benches have been built and placed especially for older people.

In Minneapolis representatives of several department stores came to the local council on aging and said, "Could you recruit us some sales ladies for the holiday

season?" The council said it would do even better—it would train them. This project has been so successful that more than half of these women have been retained after the holiday season.

One last example. I am thinking of the "party aides" who operate in one community. This came, as do most such projects, from the idea of one person. This person reasoned: "All of us like to give parties, but few have domestic help. Yet here are retired women who would make wonderful helpers at parties. Why not have a system whereby these older persons could help out as party aides?"

A program was soon developed. Party aides were easily recruited from senior activity centers. The women took a 15-hour course of instruction in which they learned how to make hors d'oeuvres, mix drinks, serve, and a great many other things of this nature. An ad was placed in the newspaper, "Party Aides Available, \$1.25 Per Hour," and a telephone number listed. The person who handled the telephone service was a homebound, bedridden lady with a telephone by her side. She took the calls and then, going down her list, called one of the party aides.

These people now are very busy; the demand for party helpers has far exceeded the supply. I asked one party aide: "How do you like it?" She said, "I love it—I go to a party now every week!" For her it is a social activity; and she is making money, too.

Formula for Success

WHAT ARE the ingredients for success in community programs for older people? There are a variety:

First, there must be a community that cares. It is easy to get individuals to work for young people in our society; it is difficult to motivate them to work for older people. You and I have an obligation to prick the conscience of the community, to make it aware of the opportunities and satisfactions and also the moral obligation that is involved. There is a Biblical injunction "Cast me not off in the time of old age, forsake me not when my strength faileth." The first requisite, then, is a community that is, indeed, taking this to heart.

The second requisite is, there must be people who will give of themselves. Money is, of course, important. But money alone is not enough. There must be people who are willing to give of themselves, much as the poet Lowell put it in the "Vision of Sir Launfal." The great knight goes out to look for the Holy Grail and when he finds it, you recall, the poet notes:

"Not what we give, but what
we share, for the gift
Without the giver is bare;
Who gives himself with his
alms feeds three—
Himself, his hungry neighbor,
and me."

There must be another ingredient—leadership. Never underestimate the

power of an individual. There must be some person who is determined he is going to carry through on an idea. There is nothing worthwhile that does not owe its start initially to a single individual with an idea and a commitment.

Finally, there must be a will to achieve. The community must want to see the idea succeed. The community must recognize that it has an obligation. It owes this obligation to those who have gone before. Newton said, "If I can see farther than those who have gone before me, it is because I am standing on their shoulders." In a real sense each generation stands on the shoulders of those who have gone before, and it has an obligation to the generation that goes before. There is a moral issue here, which I think was best stated by the late President Kennedy in a message to the Congress when he said, "We should judge ourselves as we will be judged in the eyes of others, not only by what we do in outer space but by what we do here and now for our senior citizens."



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